



Weekly Special Report



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On Women's Day, U.S. Honors Female Students for Work to Fight HIV/AIDS

Thursday March 5, 2009 Addis Ababa (U.S. Embassy) – In a ceremony at the U.S. Embassy in Addis Ababa today, the U.S. Government presented awards to female students who have excelled at fighting HIV/AIDS and gender-based violence. The event, hosted by the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), marked International Women's Day and celebrated the U.S.-Ethiopian partnership to combat HIV/AIDS and gender-based violence.



U.S. Embassy's Deputy Chief of Mission, Deborah Malac, giving an award to one of the winners.

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Ending Violence in Darfur Remains a Top Challenge for Obama

By Jim Fisher-Thompson
Staff Writer

Washington — When rebels attacked Sudanese forces in Darfur in February 2003, they sparked a government-backed genocide that has led to the deaths of more than 400,000 civilians and an international crisis that remains a high-priority foreign policy challenge for the United States.



Now, with senior officials like President Obama, Vice President Biden, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice having spoken out on the crisis, acting Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Philip Carter told America.gov February 20, "There is no

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On Women's Day, U.S. Honors Female Students for Work . . .

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The U.S. Embassy's Deputy Chief of Mission, Deborah Malac, presented awards to girls who have worked courageously to fight HIV/AIDS through involvement in their schools' "mini-media." The top three winners were selected from more than 60 nominees from 20 public high schools around Addis Ababa.

Ms. Malac noted that HIV/AIDS presents particularly difficult challenges for women and families, and explained, "PEPFAR supports efforts to provide women with economic opportunities to empower them to avoid high-risk behaviors; seek and receive health care services, and care for their families." She told the students, "We admire the courage you have shown in your schools to avert the impact of HIV." Abera Mekonnen, Chief of USAID's Basic Education Services, added, "We rely on leaders like you who have the courage to speak out about HIV/AIDS, reproductive health and gender based violence. Today I would like to congratulate you all and ask you to continue to



Information Specialist Blen Fitsum and local media interview the winners.

raise awareness of safe sex, and that violence against women and girls is unacceptable, that it harms development, and damages lives and opportunities."

International Women's Day -- a day of global celebration for the economic, political and social achievements of women past, present and

future -- is celebrated every year on March 8. Today's celebration of young women's contributions to the fight against HIV/AIDS is part of the U.S. Government's ongoing partnership with Ethiopia to promote a healthier, more prosperous tomorrow for all citizens. ♦

Ending Violence in Darfur Remains a Top Challenge for Obama . . .

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question that this [Obama] administration is dead set on solving Darfur and bringing peace to the region.

"We're doing that in large part," said Carter, who formerly served as U.S. ambassador to Guinea, "by bringing in UNAMID and by supporting the peace talks" in Doha,

Qatar, between the government of Sudan and rebel movements.

UNAMID is the U.N.-African Union Mission in Darfur, the hybrid peace-keeping force created in July 2007 that includes troops from African Union (AU) member nations.

Total U.S. government support to Darfur is approximately \$1 billion a

year, including support for peace-keeping -- 25 percent of the cost of UNAMID -- as well as humanitarian assistance, Carter said.

President Obama recently voiced his support for Darfur during a meeting with the actor George Clooney, who has been a vocal advocate for the protection of Darfuri-

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Ending Violence in Darfur Remains a Top Challenge for Obama . . .

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ans and a peaceful negotiation of the crisis in Sudan. A February 24 posting on the White House Web site following the meeting reported, "Bringing relief to the battered region of Darfur is a top priority of the Administration, the President and Vice President assured the actor and activist George Clooney last night."

UNAMID PROVING EFFECTIVE

UNAMID has proved its effectiveness by standing up to Sudanese forces that threatened to bomb a highly populated area.

Carter said that in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, where he attended the AU summit in early February, a senior Sudanese official "told us they were going to ask UNAMID to leave this area called Muhajiriya [in south Darfur]

while they conducted a bombing campaign. Instead, UNAMID refused to leave. They held their ground and protected civilians even while the [Sudanese] government bombed the outskirts of the city — even near their compound."

That was a "forthright and courageous act," Carter said, considering that UNAMID is "still in the process of building its capacity and is up to only 64 percent of its mandate of 26,000 troops."

Tim Shortley, head of the State Department's Sudan Programs Group, agreed with Carter. "UNAMID has

established itself in Darfur but still requires full strength," he told America.gov. Noting that his office and the State Department were beginning a policy review on Sudan, he said the protection of vulnerable civilians in the region is and will remain a prime concern for the Obama administration.

Ambassador Rice touched on the recent Darfur bombing when she

Following Rice's comments, the government of Sudan signed an agreement with a major rebel group, the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), that included a process to aid refugees in Darfur as well as a commitment to continue peace negotiations for the region.

"We look to this agreement as a tangible first step forward toward an inclusive framework for the resolution of the Darfur conflict," State Department spokesman Gordon Duguid said.

He added, "The United States supports these talks and encourages all parties, including armed groups, civil society and political leaders, to come together to stop the violence in Darfur and join in the search for peace."

Ambassador Carter said the February agreement and ongoing talks in Doha "will start to build confidence over the coming weeks that

allows us to sit at the table with both sides willing now to talk about a broader peace agreement built on a foundation of national unity."

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>) ♦



Representatives of Sudan's government and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), the most influential rebel group in the country's western Darfur region

told a February 3 news conference at U.N. headquarters in New York, "The United States is gravely concerned by reports of intensive aerial bombardment" in south Darfur.

"The [U.N.] secretariat reported 28 bombs dropped just this morning in Muhajiriya.

"So this is clearly a very worrisome situation, and the risk that the violence will escalate, that the government will continue its bombing and indeed a ground campaign, despite the fact that the JEM is not in Muhajiriya any more, is of grave concern," she said.

Congressman Cites Strong Bipartisan Support for Africa

By Jim Fisher-Thompson
Staff Writer

Washington — Africans have a staunch ally in the U.S. Congress, where concern for the political, economic and humanitarian challenges facing the continent remains constant, says Representative Frank Wolf.

In both the House of Representatives and Senate, “interest in Africa remains very strong across party lines,” Wolf, a Republican from Virginia, told America.gov in an interview in his Capitol Hill office February 26.

“I don’t see any partisan bickering on Africa. There is generally a bipartisan consensus here on the Hill [among Democrats and Republicans] about the need to work with Africans on critical issues like conflict resolution and development,” Wolf said.

“For example, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi [a Democrat from California] has an ongoing interest in the continent and has been quite outspoken on the crisis in Darfur,” he added.

As a ranking member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee and co-chairman of the Congressional Caucus on Sudan, Wolf has been an outspoken promoter of African causes, especially the humanitarian crisis in Darfur. Since 1989, the lawmaker has made five fact-finding trips to Sudan, including a visit to Darfur in 2004.

The government of Sudan has waged a genocidal war against rebel groups in Darfur for six years, causing more than 400,000 deaths,

mainly among innocent civilians, and forcing more than 2.5 million refugees into camps in the region and in neighboring Chad.



Representative Frank Wolf and Senator Sam Brownback toured the Mornie refugee camp in Darfur in 2004.

In response to that crisis, the United States has provided economic and humanitarian assistance worth more than \$3 billion to 47 countries in Africa, including more than \$1 billion in Sudan alone. Much of it is administered through U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) offices in 23 countries on the continent.

Peacekeeping initiatives like the African Union–United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), which receives 25 percent of its funding from the United States, and the U.N. Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC), for which the United States is the largest donor, could not have passed without strong support from both political parties in Congress.

As a recent example of bipartisanship, Wolf showed a letter he helped draft to Secretary of State Clinton before her recent trip to China, a country that has made diplomatic and business inroads on the

continent, especially in Sudan, where it has helped build an oil pipeline and port.

The letter, which asked Clinton to raise Darfur humanitarian concerns with China, was signed by prominent Democrats, including Barney Frank of Massachusetts and Eddie Bernice Johnson of Texas, as well as Republicans Ed Royce of California and Chris Smith of New Jersey.

Even as early as 2004, an atypical coalition of Congressional Black Caucus members — all Democrats — and Republicans united after a surge of killings in Darfur and pushed for resolutions by the full House and Senate condemning the government of Sudan for undertaking a genocidal campaign in the region.

Prominent Democrats who have worked with Republicans on Africa include Donald Payne of New Jersey and Mike Capuano of Massachusetts, Wolf said. Payne, who is chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee’s Africa subcommittee, is also a prominent member of the Sudan Caucus.

Capuano introduced a resolution in 2008 urging the international community to provide much-needed helicopters to aid UNAMID in its peacekeeping efforts in Darfur.

Looking to the future, Wolf said, “The requirement for this bipartisanship to be effective is for the [Obama] administration to be fully engaged,” and naming a special Africa envoy would go a long way toward achieving that end.

In a February 24 letter to the presi-

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Zimbabwe's Political Crisis Tied to Rights Abuses in 2008

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — In its annual human rights report, the State Department cited the Zimbabwean government's increased use of violence and intimidation against its citizens and political opposition during 2008, with leaders and supporters of the political opposition killed, beaten, tortured, abducted and arrested.

The department's County Reports on Human Rights Practices, first released in 1977, are submitted annually to the U.S. Congress in compliance with the federal Foreign Assistance Act.

According to the report, released February 25, President Robert Mugabe and the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) engaged in “the pervasive and systematic abuse of human rights” during a year in which it was challenged by the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in parliamentary and presidential elections.

“The ruling party's dominant control and manipulation of the political process through violence, intimidation, and corruption effectively negated the right of citizens to change their government,” the report concluded.

“Unlawful killings and politically motivated abductions increased. State-sanctioned use of excessive force increased, and security forces tortured members of the opposition, student leaders, and civil society activists with impunity,” it said.

Zimbabwe's security forces refused to document cases of political vio-



Zimbabwe's 2008 elections were marked by violence and intimidation of the political opposition by the government and its supporters.

lence committed by ZANU-PF loyalists against the opposition, the report said.

The State Department concluded that during 2008, Mugabe's government “or its agents” had killed more than 193 citizens in political violence, and the MDC claimed approximately 200 more of its members and supporters were “missing and presumed dead.”

The report said Zimbabwe's security forces, paramilitary forces such as ZANU-PF youths and war veterans, and other ZANU-PF party supporters had engaged in politically motivated killings, and that there have not been any prosecutions or convictions in any of the nearly 200 cases.

Hundreds of opposition and civil society members also reportedly

were abducted and tortured. The majority of victims were held for one or two days and then abandoned. At the end of 2008, 32 people remained either in police custody without charge or listed as missing.

The country's judicial independence was compromised by reports of government bribes and intimidation of judges, according to the State Department, and security forces also arrested and detained labor leaders, journalists, demonstrators and religious leaders during 2008.

Along with violence, corruption, harassment of minorities and intimidation of political opponents, the report also provided details on the government's killing of unauthorized mine workers in Manicaland Province and its hampering of nongovernmental organizations providing humanitarian relief.

It also cited continued human rights concerns over the situation of women and children in the country, such as women subject to violence and discrimination, child laborers and the human trafficking of both groups.

The full text of the report section on Zimbabwe (<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/af/119032.htm>) is available on the State Department Web site.

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>) ♦

U.S. Football Stars Travel to Nigeria for Humanitarian Mission

By Russell Brooks
Special Correspondent

Washington — For National Football League stars like Osi Umenyiora of the New York Giants, Amobi Okoye of the Houston Texans, and Adewale Ogunleye and Israel Idonije, both of the Chicago Bears, the annual Super Bowl game in the United States that signals the end of the U.S. professional football season marks the beginning of a new journey.

These players — many with family ties to Africa — head to Nigeria as part of “Athletes in the Diaspora.” The trip includes good works like digging water wells, handing out HIV testing kits and donating uniforms and equipment to youth soccer teams.

In 2008, Ogunleye oversaw the dedication of three wells in the Nigerian town of Emure, where his parents had lived. That year, Athletes in the Diaspora also established 20 college scholarships at 10 Nigerian universities.

On March 20, the group once again travels to Nigeria to expand the programs started in 2008.

NEW MEDICAL MISSION

A new group member, Tommie Harris of the Chicago Bears, approached a group of physicians and nurses affiliated with INTEGRIS Health, a nonprofit health care system based in Oklahoma, about assisting in a medical mission to Africa.

Aware that Nigeria is plagued by malaria and other treatable diseases, six doctors and six nurses, three of whom are from Nigeria and



Osi Umenyiora of the New York Giants — here celebrating a 2007 Super Bowl win — travels to Nigeria with “Athletes in the Diaspora.”

one from Ghana, volunteered to provide clinical services in Abuja, Lagos, Port Harcourt and both Bayelsa and Anambra states in southern Nigeria. The medical personnel will provide medical screenings and treatment for malaria, in addition to health education and awareness programs.

Harris, Okoye, Idonije and Ogunleye, along with Nnamdi Asomugha of the Oakland Raiders and Xavier Adibi of the Houston Texans, will accompany the medical personnel.

PLAYERS DRAWN TO FAMILY HOMELANDS

Umenyiora, who was born in London of Nigerian parents, moved to the United States as a teen, but feels drawn to the land of his parents and is eager to share his success with the less fortunate.

He said the reaction to last year’s trip was good. “There aren’t the same opportunities as in the U.S., [so] hopefully we can help.” He dreams of starting a youth program that would teach American football to Nigerian youngsters.

Umenyiora is in the midst of rehabilitation from a season-ending injury and must focus on returning to the playing field, so he may not be able to travel to Nigeria this year with his colleagues.

Nevertheless, he would like to see their initiative spread beyond Nigeria to include Liberia, Ghana, Senegal and Cote d’Ivoire, he said.

Umenyiora’s potential contributions to Africa are not confined to the humanitarian area. He told America.gov he has plans to launch a political career in Nigeria once his football days are behind him. “I would like to be a governor and maybe run for the presidency.”

Russell Brooks is a press officer at the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of African Affairs.

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>) ♦

Liberian Community Radio Reaches Out to Politically Isolated

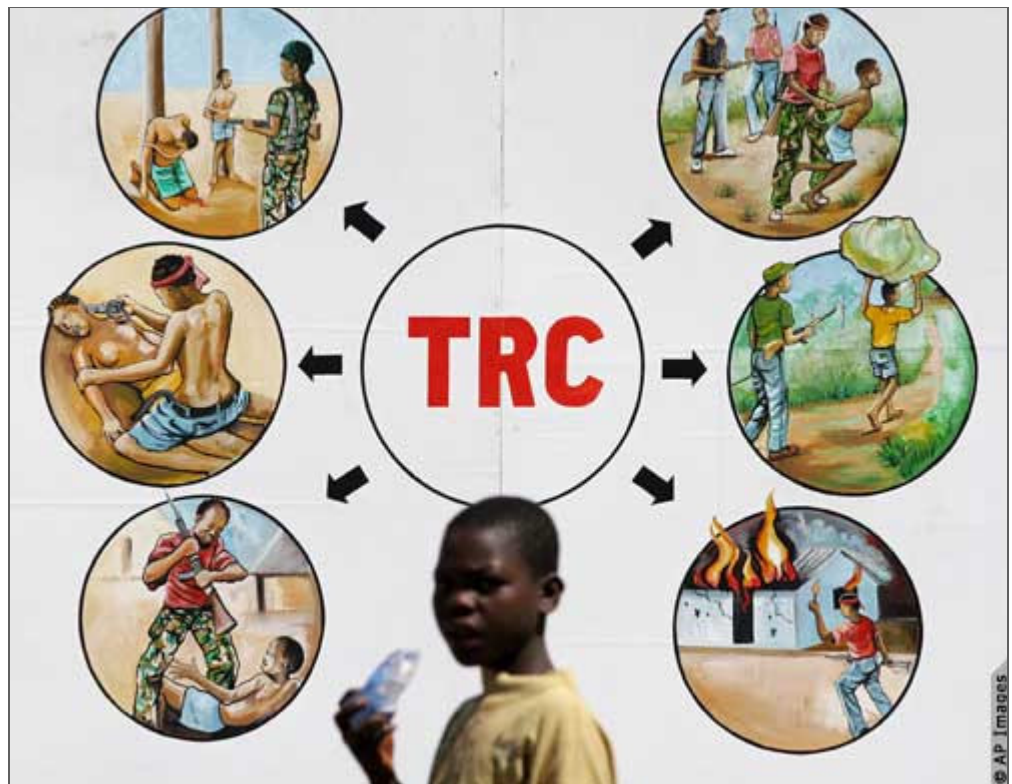
By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — After more than a decade of civil conflict, most Liberians welcome the peace that has prevailed since 2003, but are still coping with bitter memories of atrocities and tragedies because many civilians fell victim to the fighting between government and rebel forces. Now, as a truth and reconciliation commission is forcing the country to face its recent past, Liberia's emerging community radio stations are trying to use the airwaves to target previously isolated citizens and promote a lasting peace.

Liberian journalists are reaching out to their local communities with radio programming on how citizens can settle their grievances against each other and the government through a variety of means, ranging from the courts to traditional African mediation and conflict resolution practices. They also are providing a forum for live talk and call-in shows.

"The whole idea of using community radio to empower people is relatively new in Liberia," William Burke of the Mano River Media Forum, a nonprofit organization that promotes professional journalism techniques in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea, told America.gov. But community radio stations, he said, "are helping to give the voiceless a voice."

Burke is a U.S.-based Liberian journalist who has previously worked at CNN.



Instead of a war crimes court, Liberians chose a truth and reconciliation process and encouraged victims to tell their stories.

Community radio stations target specific areas and offer unique programming for residents. Because of their local nature, they can create special programs and highlight information that might not otherwise be heard on more nationally based radio stations. However, compared to their commercial competitors, they often are limited by a lack of financial resources.

Burke said community radio is helping many in Liberia who have previously suffered from political isolation.

"What community radio is doing is helping to erase that line of demarcation between those people who could be governed but in the past

had no access to information, and those who are governing or ... those who are influencing politics," he said.

Providing the isolated with programming tailored specifically for them will "further enhance democracy and help bring about reconciliation in society," Burke said.

The stations are trying to increase the number of call-in shows to encourage more participation. The shows are gaining in popularity despite the fact that many listeners, especially in the rural areas, remain shy about calling in.

"They understand the program ... but they don't feel comfortable

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Liberian Community Radio Reaches Out to Politically Isolated . . .

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enough in terms of having a good command of the English language to participate in this kind of programming," he said.

Nevertheless, radio in Liberia today "has become more interactive," and most managers and producers are actively seeking funding and training for their staffs so that can continue.

FINAL REPORT PRESENTS OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The 2003 peace agreement that ended the civil war also established the truth and reconciliation commission, and Liberians have been encouraged to report human rights abuses and atrocities they had suffered or witnessed. The commission

estimates that during the 14 years of war, up to 300,000 Liberians were killed, hundreds of thousands of women were raped and many Liberians fled to neighboring countries out of fear of both sides that were fighting in the conflict. Other atrocities, including torture, amputation, arson, women forced into marriage and children forced to be soldiers, have been documented by the commission.

The commission's final report is expected in June, and Burke said Liberia's community radio stations must now rise to the challenge of reporting the findings. There is a fear that many of the recommendations will "just stay on the shelf and collect dust."

The community radio stations instead hope to "use the report as the

foundation to begin the process of reconciliation, and help the people to understand the report," he said, but they are also seeking financial support so that their own journalists can receive training to help them understand the commission process and its recommendations so they more effectively pass that information along to their audiences.

The Mano River Media Forum is one of many community-based efforts around the world promoting peaceful interaction and offering alternatives to violence.

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>) ♦

Congressman Cites Strong Bipartisan Support for Africa . . .

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dent, Wolf made the case for a "high-caliber" special envoy to Sudan who would work to bring an "end to a brutal 20-year war between the genocidal government in Khartoum and the South."

Obama has a great team to work on African issues, Wolf said, adding, "Samantha Power is a great example." The human rights expert and Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, who has written numerous articles about Africa, was recently appointed by Obama to be an adviser on his National Security Council.

"Her book *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide* was one of the most impressive books I've ever read," Wolf said. "I think she will make a very effective adviser because she speaks the truth and understands the underlying causes of genocide in Sudan."

Obama's ambassador to the United Nations, Susan Rice, is "also another example of a foreign policy expert who understands Africa," Wolf said. "She was very good on the issues when she worked as an Africa adviser in President Clinton's National Security Council and later

as assistant secretary of state for Africa. Actually, I think she was the best one [assistant secretary of state for Africa] since I've been in Congress."

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>) ♦

Obama Says Combat Forces to Be Withdrawn from Iraq in 2010

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — The United States will withdraw most of its military forces from Iraq by mid-2010 through a phased design that cements security gains as the Iraqi government strengthens.

"By August 31, 2010, our combat mission in Iraq will end," President Obama said. "Because the most important decisions that have to be made about Iraq's future must now be made by Iraqis."

Speaking to an audience of U.S. Marines and their families at the Marine Corps base at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, February 27, the president said the withdrawal of forces will be carefully measured and will be based on continuous consultations with military commanders in Iraq and the Iraqi government.

"Our enemies should be left with no doubt: This plan gives our military the forces and the flexibility they need to support our Iraqi partners, and to succeed," Obama said.

There are approximately 142,000 U.S. troops in Iraq, according to the U.S. Defense Department.

A residual force of between 35,000 and 50,000 U.S. troops will remain in Iraq into 2011 with the primary mission of training, equipping and advising Iraqi security forces; conducting targeted counterterrorism missions; and protecting U.S. civil-

ian and military efforts. By the end of 2011, all U.S. forces will be withdrawn under a Status of Forces Agreement with the approval of the Iraqi government. The only thing that could alter the withdrawal timetable is a new outbreak of violence from the insurgency.

of our strategy in Iraq to determine the best way to strengthen that foundation while strengthening American national security," Obama said. "I have listened to my secretary of defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and commanders on the ground."



Iraqis watch a live broadcast of US President Barack Obama's speech in a shop in Baghdad, Iraq, Friday, Feb. 27, 2009. (AP Photo/Karim Kadim)

Force levels are expected to remain relatively constant until after Iraqi general elections this December, then the withdrawal process will begin in earnest.

"The drawdown of our military should send a clear signal that Iraq's future is now its own responsibility. The long-term success of the Iraqi nation will depend upon decisions made by Iraq's leaders and the fortitude of the Iraqi people,"

Obama said.

As combat brigades are gradually withdrawn, Obama said, the United States will pursue the second part of its strategy: sustained diplomacy for a more peaceful and prosperous Iraq. Leading that effort will be the new U.S. ambassador to Iraq, Christopher Hill, who is moving from his post as assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs and chief negotiator in the Six-Party Talks on North Korea's nuclear weapons program.

ASSISTANCE FOR IRAQI REFUGEES

"Diplomacy and assistance is also required to help the millions of dis-

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The timeline selected by the president was the primary recommendation of Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Navy Admiral Mike Mullen, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The final decision was made by the president February 26 at the White House. The withdrawal plan is slightly slower than Obama had proposed during his presidential campaign in 2008, but after extensive consultations with the Pentagon, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and military commanders and diplomats in Iraq, the president chose to follow Gates and Mullen's counsel.

"On my first full day in office, I directed my national security team to undertake a comprehensive review

Clinton Leaves for Middle East, Europe for Extended Talks

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton is beginning a series of official visits to the Middle East and to Europe aimed at restarting Mideast peace talks and boosting trans-Atlantic relations.

Clinton begins the trip March 2 at the Egyptian Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh at a donors conference for Gaza. The conference seeks to raise \$2 billion for recovery in the Gaza Strip, which was badly damaged by a three-week conflict between Israel and Hamas.

The United States will offer \$900 million that will go to the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank for Palestinians in Gaza.

"I'm eager to meet with leaders to hear their thoughts about the best way to move forward on seeking peace and security," Clinton said February 27 in an interview with the Voice of America. "So at Sharm el-Sheikh, I'll be joining other members of the international community to address the immediate humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

"We want to strengthen a Palestinian partner willing to accept the conditions outlined by the Quartet and the Arab summit; in other

words, a renouncement of violence, a recognition of Israel, and a commitment to abide by the previous agreements entered in by the Palestinian Authority," she said.

After the conference, Clinton travels to Jerusalem for meetings with

NATO foreign ministers March 5. In addition she will meet with the NATO foreign ministers as well as foreign ministers from European Union countries and Switzerland on trans-Atlantic relations. There will be a separate meeting, the State Department says, with EU officials.



Secretary Clinton, right, meets with Egyptian Foreign Minister Aboul Gheit.

Israeli officials and then to the West Bank for meetings with senior Palestinian officials.

"We are still committed to a two-state solution," Clinton said.

Clinton said recent efforts by the Egyptians to help the Palestinian Authority, led by the Fatah Party, and Hamas, which seized control of Gaza in 2007, reach an accord on a unity government is important for moving toward reconciliation.

After meetings in the Middle East, Clinton leaves for Brussels, Belgium, for an informal conference of

to cooperation in areas such as Afghanistan.

What foreign affairs actions should President Obama consider? Comment on America.gov's blog. (<http://blogs.america.gov/campaign/2009/01/21/day-2-what-should-obama%e2%80%99s-top-priorities-be/>)

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>) ♦

U.S. Will Work Vigorously for Independent Palestinian State

By Merle David Kelerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — The United States will continue to work with Israelis and Palestinians to create a peace accord that includes the creation of an independent Palestinian state.

"The United States will be vigorously engaged in the pursuit of a two-state solution every step of the way," Clinton said March 3 at a Jerusalem press briefing. "The road ahead, we acknowledge, is a difficult one, but there is no time to waste."

"It is our assessment ... that eventually, the inevitability of working toward a two-state solution seems inescapable."

Clinton, who is making her first visit to the Middle East since becoming secretary of state, held meetings with Israeli President Shimon Peres, Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, Defense Minister Ehud Barak and Prime Minister-designate Benjamin Netanyahu prior to a dinner meeting with current Prime Minister Ehud Olmert.

The secretary is scheduled to meet with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad on March 4 in the

West Bank city of Ramallah.

A significant component of U.S. policy in the Middle East is to work for a peace accord between the Israelis and Palestinians that will lead to Palestinian statehood. Peace talks that were revived in late 2007 at a conference in the United States have stalled following an Israeli offensive in the Gaza Strip in December 2008 aimed at halting rocket attacks by the terrorist group

down on Israel."

During an international conference March 2, the United States pledged \$900 million in assistance to the Palestinians, with a third of it going to help people in Gaza and the remainder going to the Palestinian Authority, which controls the West Bank territories.

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Secretary Clinton, left, and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas smile after a press conference at Abbas' headquarters in the West Bank town of Ramallah, Wednesday, March 4, 2009. (AP Photo/Bernat Armangué)



Secretary Clinton talks with Palestinian students at the English Access Microscholarship program in the West Bank city of Ramallah, Wednesday, March 4, 2009. (AP Photo/David Furst, Pool)

Hamas. Hamas seized control of Gaza from the ruling Palestinian Authority in 2007.

Clinton said one of the first steps needed now is a durable cease-fire, which means daily rocket attacks by Hamas into southern Israel must end. She said that between 15 and 18 rockets were fired into Israel from Gaza in the last several days.

"No nation should be expected to sit idly by and allow rockets to assault its people and its territories," she said. "These attacks must stop and so must the smuggling of weapons into Gaza."

"That is the double reality that we're facing here. We have a humanitarian challenge in Gaza with a lot of innocent Palestinians in need of the help that could be provided, and Hamas decides to continue to rain rockets

United States May Boycott U.N. Racism Conference

By David McKeeby
Staff Writer

Washington — The United States will not participate in an upcoming U.N. conference in Geneva, Switzerland, on racism unless the conference officials make major revisions to a key document that critics argue unfairly singles out Israel for criticism and that could erode the fundamental right to freedom of speech.

"A conference based on this text would be a missed opportunity to speak clearly about the persistent problem of racism," State Department acting spokesman Robert Wood said February 27. "The United States will not engage in further negotiations on this text, nor will we participate in a conference based on this text."

The announcement follows negotiations in Geneva over an outcome document for the April 20–24 Durban Review Conference, organized to review progress since the 2001 World Summit Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, held in Durban, South Africa.

U.N. officials have hoped that the Obama administration would participate in the April conference, saying the election of the first African-American president presents the United States with an opportunity to highlight U.S. progress in race relations in recent decades.

The Obama administration sent a diplomatic delegation to Geneva to take part in planning for the conference, America's first engagement in the process since U.S. officials walked out of the 2001 conference in protest over the Durban Declara-



*State Department acting spokesman
Robert Wood*

tion and Program of Action. The document strongly criticized Israel's conduct in its relations with the Palestinians as so-called "racism" while ignoring numerous other cases of serious rights abuses around the world — a position which the United States could not support.

"Unfortunately," Wood said, "the document being negotiated has gone from bad to worse, and the current text of the draft outcome document is not salvageable."

Wood called on conference organizers to shorten the current 45-page draft and reconsider its reiteration of what he called the "flawed" Durban declaration. To win U.S. support, the document must not isolate any one country or conflict, Wood said. A "viable text" must also move away from endorsing the "troubling" concept of "defamation of religion." Supporters of the defamation of religion language say it is

intended to protect cultural sensitivities. But the United States and a growing number of other countries fear the language could be used to silence political dissent and undermine freedom of speech.

Israel and Canada plan to boycott the April conference, while several other countries, including Australia, Denmark, France, Italy, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, have shared America's concerns about the tone of the proceedings.

"We would be prepared to re-engage if a document that meets these criteria becomes the basis for deliberations," Wood said. "This administration is committed to diplomacy and to active and effective engagement with international institutions, which can play a vital role in addressing the challenges we face."

The United States will maintain its observer status in the U.N. Human Rights Council, Wood said, despite the body's "repeated and unbalanced criticisms of Israel."

"We share the concerns of many that the council's trajectory is disturbing, that it needs fundamental change to do more to promote and protect the human rights of people around the world," Wood said. "We believe, however, it furthers our interests and will do more both to achieve these ends and advance human rights if we are part of the conversation and present at the council's proceedings."

Created in 2006 to replace the discredited U.N. Commission on Human Rights, the council has been widely criticized for its repeated refusal to take action against docu-

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Illegal Drug Trade Takes Lives, Ruins Societies

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — The illegal drug trade takes lives, ruins societies and undermines legitimate law enforcement and government institutions, according to the State Department's 2009 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report.

"The United States provides substantial resources to assist states in developing law enforcement and judicial institutions necessary to prevent illegal drugs and crime from reaching our shores," Assistant Secretary of State David Johnson said February 27 at a department briefing.

Johnson said judicial systems must become more universally accessible, impunity among drug cartels needs to end and widespread corruption must be confronted and reduced.

Along the southern border of the United States, the Mexican government has taken significant steps to reform its domestic court system and law enforcement agencies and promote the rule of law, Johnson said. He is the assistant secretary of state for international narcotics and law enforcement.

Johnson said the government of President Felipe Calderón has been courageous in confronting drug cartels and limiting their ability to do business. "The result is, unfortunately, a significant level of violence," he said.

The challenge is serious for both Mexico and the United States, he



opium poppy. "Greater leadership and effort by the Afghan government, both at the central and provincial levels, will be required to combat the corrosive effects of the drug trade, which fuels both the insurgency as well as rampant corruption," Johnson said.

"In the provinces that have become or stayed poppy-free, strong Afghan leadership, internal security, and the availability of incentives are among the factors that have led farmers to seek alternative livelihoods," the State Department said in the report. "It is important to highlight the contributions, especially by the Afghans, to reducing cul-

tivation."

said, but Mexico has been taking steps that are necessary to get control of the situation.

"The United States is committed to support these efforts, including further steps to confront and dismantle the drug cartels that are responsible for smuggling most of the cocaine, heroin and methamphetamine consumed within the United States," Johnson said.

Afghanistan's narcotics situation remains serious, Johnson said, though last year there was some success. "During this year, poppy cultivation declined by 19 percent after two years of record highs, and the number of poppy-free provinces increased from 13 in 2007 to 18 in 2008," he said.

But Afghanistan remains the world's largest producer of the

tion."

In the Andean region where all cocaine originates, Johnson said, Colombia has taken further steps to consolidate the gains it has achieved over the past decade. Colombian authorities have improved their ability to eradicate coca fields, destroy drug labs and intercept shipments.

Colombian authorities reported seizing more than 223 metric tons of cocaine in 2008, an all-time record, and destroying 301 cocaine hydrochloride labs and another 3,238 cocaine base labs, the report said.

"In Bolivia over the past year, Bolivian government decisions limited cooperation and prevented us from achieving all that we could against international drug trafficking," John-

(Continued on page 15)

Republicans Ready to Work with Obama, Louisiana Governor Says

By Michelle Austein Brooks
Staff Writer

Washington — “Republicans are ready to work with the new president” to find solutions to the nation’s economic problems, said Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal, speaking after President Obama’s address to Congress February 24.

Jindal, speaking on behalf of the Republican Party from the governor’s mansion in the Louisiana capital of Baton Rouge, said his party has an “honest and fundamental disagreement” with Democrats about the role of government.

In his address to Congress, President Obama laid out his vision for strengthening the American economy by creating new jobs, reforming education and health care and reducing the budget. “We will rebuild, we will recover, and the United States of America will emerge stronger than before,” the president said.

“We appreciate [Obama’s] message of hope, but sometimes it seems we look for hope in different places. Democratic leaders in Washington place their hope in the federal government. We place our hope in you — the American people.”

Since 1966, the party not occupying the White House has selected a member to give a speech responding to the president’s joint address to Congress, a speech that is known as the State of the Union address except in the years in which a new president is inaugurated. Television networks broadcast the opposition response following the president’s remarks.

The opposition response provides



Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal

an opportunity for the minority party to comment on the president’s initiatives and outline its party goals.

Jindal said his party shares Obama’s belief in the importance of strengthening the economy by investing in improvements for energy, health care and education. But Republicans have views that differ from the president’s on how these accomplishments can be achieved, the governor said.

Responding to the president’s statements on reforming the defense budget, Jindal said, “Now is no time to dismantle the defenses that have protected this country for hundreds of years, or make deep cuts in funding for our troops. America’s fighting men and women can do anything. And if we give them the resources they need, they will stay on the offensive, defeat our enemies and protect us from harm.”

JINDAL VIEWED AS RISING POLITICAL STAR IN REPUBLICAN PARTY

Sometimes a political party chooses a relatively new face to give its response because it is an opportunity to bring national attention to a figure that party leaders believe might play a prominent role in politics for years to come.

At 37, Jindal is the nation’s youngest governor. He is the son of Indian immigrants, and in October 2007 he became the first Indian American to be elected as a state’s chief executive.

Jindal was born in Baton Rouge in 1971, but his family’s hometown is Maler Kotla in India’s northern Punjab state. His parents left Maler Kotla to enable his mother to study at Louisiana State University.

Although his given name is Piyush, Jindal in 1975 began calling himself Bobby, after the youngest son on the Brady Bunch television show, a popular comedy. Later, in secondary school, he gave up Hinduism to become a Christian, and was baptized as a Roman Catholic while attending Brown University.

After studying as a Rhodes scholar at Oxford University, Jindal turned down admissions to the medical and law schools of both Harvard and Yale universities to serve as secretary of the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals. He later was appointed to an assistant secretary post at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. After an unsuccessful race for governor in 2003, he was elected in 2004 to the U.S. House of Representatives from a district in

(Continued on page 15)

U.S. Will Work Vigorously for Independent Palestinian State . . .

(Continued from page 11)

SYRIAN ENVOYS

Clinton also announced that the United States was sending two envoys to Syria to conduct "preliminary conversations." State Department acting deputy spokesman Gordon Duguid said March 3 in Washington that Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Jeffrey Felton would lead the American delegation to Damas-

cus along with Daniel Shapiro from the White House.

There are a number of issues the United States wants to address with the Damascus government, Clinton said. The last senior U.S. official to visit Damascus was then Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage in January 2005.

"We have no way to predict what the future with our relations concerning Syria might be. ... We don't

engage in discussions for the sake of having a conversation," Clinton said. "But I think it is a worthwhile effort to go and begin these preliminary conversations."

What actions do you think President Obama should take to promote human rights? Comment on America.gov's blog (<http://blogs.america.gov/campaign/2009/01/21/day-2-what-should-obama%e2%80%99s-top-priorities-be/>). ♦

Illegal Drug Trade Takes Lives, Ruins Societies . . .

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son said. He said the United States is looking at achieving better cooperation with the Bolivian government.

However, efforts in Andean countries collectively have prevented hundreds of metric tons of cocaine

from reaching the United States and deprived international drug syndicates of billions of dollars in profits, the report said.

Johnson said cooperation with authorities in Venezuela has been minimal. "We'd like to see a much more robust cooperative program," he said.

In 2008, Venezuela reported seizures of more than 54 metric tons of cocaine, but the government does not allow the United States to confirm its seizures, the report said. ♦

Republicans Ready to Work with Obama . . .

(Continued from page 14)

suburban New Orleans.

Young and articulate, Jindal is often cited as a person who could be a leader of the Republican Party. Since becoming governor, Jindal has risen quickly in the party, often speaking on behalf of the national Republican organization on television programs. Political pundits sometimes compare him to another fast-rising political star — Barack Obama.

In November 2008, Jindal paid a visit to Iowa, the state known for hosting the first presidential primary contest. This fueled speculation that Jindal might be considering a presidential bid in 2012. However, Jindal says the only campaign he is planning is a 2011 re-election bid for governor. ♦

U. S. May Boycott U.N. Racism Conference . . .

(Continued from page 12)

mented abuses in Zimbabwe, North Korea, Iran, Belarus and Cuba.

"These times demand seriousness and candor, and we pledge to closely work with our partners in the international community to avoid politicization and to achieve our shared goals," Wood said. "Our participation as an observer is a sign of the commitment of the administration to advancing the cause of human rights in the multilateral arena."

What actions do you think President Obama should take to promote human rights? Comment on America.gov's blog (<http://blogs.america.gov/campaign/2009/01/21/day-2-what-should-obama%e2%80%99s-top-priorities-be/>). ♦

Presidential Proclamation on Women's History Month

WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH,
2009

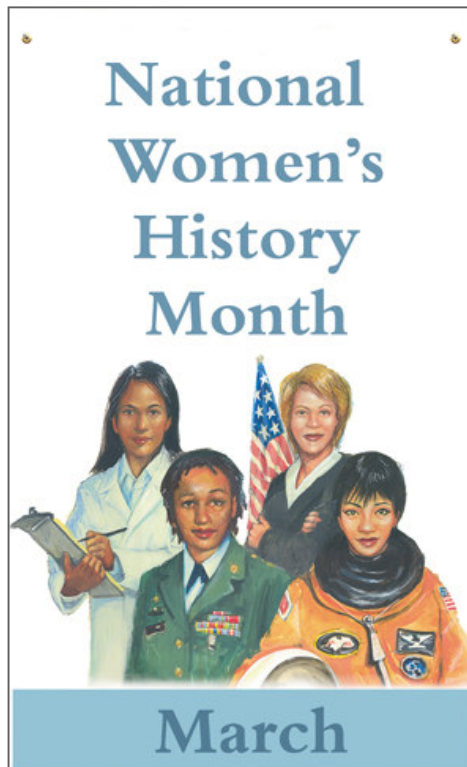
BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

A PROCLAMATION

With passion and courage, women have taught us that when we band together to advocate for our highest ideals, we can advance our common well-being and strengthen the fabric of our Nation. Each year during Women's History Month, we remember and celebrate women from all walks of life who have shaped this great Nation. This year, in accordance with the theme, "Women Taking the Lead to Save our Planet," we pay particular tribute to the efforts of women in preserving and protecting the environment for present and future generations.

Ellen Swallow Richards is known to have been the first woman in the United States to be accepted at a scientific school. She graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1873 and went on to become a prominent chemist. In 1887, she conducted a survey of water quality in Massachusetts. This study, the first of its kind in America, led to the Nation's first state water-quality standards.

Women have also taken the lead throughout our history in preserving our natural environment. In 1900, Maria Sanford led the Minnesota Federation of Women's Groups in their efforts to protect forestland near the Mississippi River, which eventually became the Chippewa National Forest, the first Congressionally mandated national forest. Marjory Stoneman Douglas dedicated her life to protecting and restoring the Florida Everglades. Her



book, *The Everglades: Rivers of Grass*, published in 1947, led to the preservation of the Everglades as a National Park. She was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1993.

Rachel Carson brought even greater attention to the environment by exposing the dangers of certain pesticides to the environment and to human health. Her landmark 1962 book, *Silent Spring*, was fiercely criticized for its unconventional perspective. As early as 1963, however, President Kennedy acknowledged its importance and appointed a panel to investigate the book's findings. *Silent Spring* has emerged as a seminal work in environmental studies. Carson was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom posthumously in 1980.

Grace Thorpe, another leading environmental advocate, also connected environmental protection with human well-being by emphasizing the

vulnerability of certain populations to environmental hazards. In 1992, she launched a successful campaign to organize Native Americans to oppose the storage of nuclear waste on their reservations, which she said contradicted Native American principles of stewardship of the earth. She also proposed that America invest in alternative energy sources such as hydroelectricity, solar power, and wind power.

These women helped protect our environment and our people while challenging the status quo and breaking social barriers. Their achievements inspired generations of American women and men not only to save our planet, but also to overcome obstacles and pursue their interests and talents. They join a long and proud history of American women leaders, and this month we honor the contributions of all women to our Nation.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, BARACK OBAMA, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim March 2009 as Women's History Month. I call upon all our citizens to observe this month with appropriate programs, ceremonies, and activities that honor the history, accomplishments, and contributions of American women.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this third day of March, in the year of our Lord two thousand nine, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirty-third.

BARACK OBAMA ♦

Singer/Composer Stevie Wonder Honored at White House Ceremony

By Michael Bandler
Staff Writer

Washington — At the onset of his career, when he was hailed as a music prodigy before he'd even reached his teens, the word "little" preceded his name.

But Stevie Wonder — newest recipient of the Library of Congress' prestigious Gershwin Prize for Popular Song — is "little" no more, neither in age nor in terms of his global influence across the musical landscape.

As his fans can attest, the 58-year-old Wonder — who has been blind since birth — has evolved from the rhythm-and-blues tempos of his youthful effort "Fingertips (Pt. 2)," the song that topped the charts when he was just 13. From the soulful Motown sound of those and subsequent years, he made the creative leap in his early 20s to experimenting with a wide variety of instruments and styles.

As he grew creatively, his popularity expanded as well. A Number 1 hit with a strong percussive groove, "Superstition," cemented his status as a fixture on rock radio stations. Wonder's fan base also increased exponentially during the 1980s and 1990s, a period in which he composed some of his best-known romantic numbers and social commentaries — songs like "I Just Called to Say I Love You" and the collaborative "Ebony and Ivory," composed with Paul McCartney as a call for racial harmony.

Self-taught on the harmonica and drums, and drawn to pop rhythms, Wonder has been a dominant presence on musical charts, at awards ceremonies and on "greatest album" lists — with dozens of Number 1 singles and Grammy awards

the American tradition — artists demonstrating the courage, the talent to find new harmonies in the rich and dissonant sounds of the American experience."

For the president — a longtime fan, along with first lady Michelle

Obama, of the singer/composer — the salute was personal. Wonder's songs "became the soundtrack of my youth," he said. "Through them I found peace and inspiration, especially in difficult times. And I'm not alone. Millions of people around the world have found similar comfort and joy in Stevie's music, and his unique capacity to find hope in struggle, and humanity in our

common hardships. This is the gift that music affords us, transporting us from the here and now, relieving us of our burdens, even if it's just for the length of a song."

The Library of Congress' Gershwin Prize is among the rarest honors on America's musical scene. Named for George Gershwin — the legendary 20th-century composer of everything from symphonies to Broadway show tunes — and his brother Ira, a noted lyricist, it has been awarded only once before: to singer/composer Paul Simon, in 2007.

According to Librarian of Congress James Billington, the award was

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US President Barack Obama presents musician Stevie Wonder with the Library of Congress Gershwin Prize for Popular Song in the East Room of the White House, in Washington, DC, on February 25. (AFP/Saul Loeb)

to his credit. Above all, though, it has been his ability to move seamlessly from one musical genre to another that has made him the beloved artist that he is.

At a White House ceremony and concert February 25 that featured an array of artists drawn from the different musical worlds that Wonder has enhanced through his craft, President Obama underscored the breadth of Wonder's reach.

"Stevie has always drawn on an incredible range of traditions in his music, and from them he's created a style that is at once uniquely American, uniquely his own and yet somehow universal," the president said. "Indeed, this could be called

Fiscal 2010 Budget Seeks More Spending for Diplomacy, Assistance

By Phillip Kurata
Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama is calling for a nearly 10 percent increase for spending on diplomacy and foreign assistance in 2010, putting the United States on a path toward greatly increasing its spending in those areas, according to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB).

"This funding will help the world's weakest states reduce poverty, combat global health threats, develop markets, govern peacefully, and expand democracy worldwide," an OMB document dealing with funding for the State Department and other international programs says. The 2010 request is for \$51.7 billion, compared to \$47.2 billion projected to be spent in fiscal 2009, the OMB said.

The OMB did not provide detailed figures of how the administration would spend the proposed foreign affairs budget. The full details of the 2010 budget will be released in April. But the final budget figures for fiscal 2010, which starts in October 2009, will not be known until Congress enacts legislation later this year.

In its February 26 announcement, the OMB said nonmilitary aid to Afghanistan and Pakistan will be increased to help those countries revitalize economic development and confront the resurgence of the Taliban.

The former Taliban regime in Afghanistan provided refuge for al-Qaida, which launched the attacks of September 11, 2001, against New York and Washington. The United States and NATO allies toppled the Taliban from power in Ka-



President Obama, flanked by Treasury Secretary Geithner, center, and Budget Director Orszag, right, speaks about 2010 budget request.

bul, but its guerrilla fighters still control large areas in the Afghan hinterlands.

OMB Director Peter Orszag said his office has earmarked \$130 billion for military operations in Afghanistan, Iraq and overseas contingency actions, but he did not mention civilian expenditures in those countries during his February 26 news conference in Washington.

The diplomatic and development assistance for Iraq in 2010 is intended to "help responsibly end that war and enable Iraqis to assume more control of their country," the OMB document says.

Speaking at another venue in Wash-

ington the same day that the budget was announced, U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said spending for scientific and technological research in the realm of food production will go up because the global population is rising and more food is needed to feed everyone.

Vilsack said limited natural resources, particularly water, make the quest for adequate food more difficult.

While details are lacking until the April release of more specific funding proposals, the document released February 26 said the president is seeking:

Funding for energy initiatives and programs to combat global climate change.

Expansion of the Peace Corps.

Full funding for all scheduled payments to the World Bank and other multilateral development banks "to reinforce the U.S. commitment to play a leadership role in these institutions."

Funding to meet U.S. financial commitments to the United Nations and other international organizations that support U.S. goals.

Support for United Nations peacekeeping activities.

Increasing counterterrorism and law enforcement aid to critical partner nations, as well as increasing

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Financial Crisis Tops Agenda in British Prime Minister's Visit

By David McKeeby
Staff Writer

Washington — America's "special relationship" with Britain is more vital than ever as both nations stand together to face a host of emerging challenges, from a global financial crisis to international efforts to stabilize Afghanistan, says President Obama.

"Britain is one of our closest, strongest allies," Obama said in a March 3 press appearance with British Prime Minister Gordon Brown at the White House. "There is a link, a bond that will not break. And I think that's true not only on the economic front but also on issues of common security."

As the world faces an increasingly serious economic crisis, Brown — a former finance minister — comes to Washington seeking to focus what he called a "partnership of purpose" between London and Washington for restoring global financial markets. Brown will also discuss the financial crisis in an address to a joint session of the U.S. Congress March 4.

Support for struggling banks and economic stimulus must be followed by improved international standards of accountability for banks, hedge funds and other international financial entities, part of what Brown has called "a global New Deal."

"We still have the 1930s regulatory system in place in most countries, designed from the last great crisis," Obama said. "We've got to update

our institutions, our regulatory frameworks so that the power of globalization is channeled for the benefit of ordinary men and women."

The two leaders also agreed that countries must resist the temptation



President Obama and British Prime Minister Gordon Brown at the White House March 3.

of trade protectionism.

"Globalization can be an enormous force for good," Obama said. "We should encourage trade. The fact that we have a global capital system allows money to flow to areas that previously couldn't get capital. That allows them to develop and to grow. That can grow the economy worldwide, increase trade, and that potentially benefits everybody."

Obama and Brown will continue their discussion in London April 2, when they join other leaders from the Group of 20 developed and emerging economies.

ALLIES DISCUSS AFGHANISTAN STRATEGY

The two leaders also discussed the need to formulate a reinvigorated international strategy to help the people of Afghanistan take their country back from extremists and emerge from decades of poverty and war.

"Britain and the United States share a deep interest in ensuring that neither Afghanistan nor Pakistan are safe havens for terrorist activity," Obama said. "Our strongest partner in that effort once again will be the United Kingdom."

Britain has the second largest contingent of troops in Afghanistan as part of the 41-nation, 55,000-strong International Security Assistance Force led by NATO. Most of the United Kingdom's 8,000 troops serve alongside U.S. forces in the country's southeast, where Taliban and al-Qaida militants launch daily attacks on Afghan communities from strongholds in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region.

Obama has identified Afghanistan as a top foreign policy priority, naming veteran peacemaker Richard Holbrooke as his special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, deploying 17,000 additional U.S. forces to the region, and initiating wide-ranging consultations with trans-Atlantic and South Asian partners on formulating a new regional security strategy.

The two leaders agreed on the need to strengthen diplomacy and devel-

(Continued on page 20)

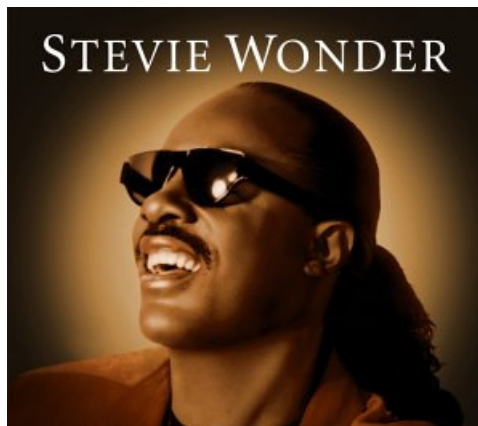
Singer/Composer Stevie Wonder Honored . . .

(Continued from page 17)

created “to honor an artist whose creative output transcends distinctions between musical styles and idioms, bringing diverse listeners together, and fostering mutual understanding and appreciation.”

Added Billington: “Stevie Wonder’s music epitomizes this ideal.”

Along with the honor came a commission from the library for a musical piece, “Sketches of a Life.” Wonder debuted the 20-minute concerto in nine movements at the Library of Congress on February 23, playing several instruments, with a 21-piece chamber orchestra accompanying him. Although the piece was written between 1976 and 1994, it never had been publicly



performed until now. Wonder said he was waiting for just the right occasion to unveil it.

Writing in the Washington Post, J. Freedom du Lac described the piece as a musical landscape that shifts among pop show tunes, jazz, chamber funk and blues-jazz instrumen-

tal. “Wonder seemed comfortable with the form,” the reviewer observed, “and even displayed impressive restraint for a newcomer in the classical sandbox, staying away from bombast and saving the musical flyover for the triumphal, regal finale, which was full of horn fanfare.”

Speaking at the White House at the culmination of a week of ceremony and celebration, Wonder expressed appreciation for the honor, saying he accepted the award in memory of his mother.

“I know that Lula Mae is smiling right now,” he said. “I know that if she were here, Mr. President, she’d say, ‘Let me get him a peach cobbler.’” ♦

Financial Crisis Tops Agenda . . .

(Continued from page 19)

opment efforts on both sides of the border. They also want to match security operations with a renewed focus on helping Afghans build effective governing institutions that can deliver essential services to the citizens.

The Obama administration plans to unveil its new Afghan security strategy ahead of the 60th Anniversary NATO Summit hosted jointly by France and Germany April 3-4, where Obama and Brown will meet again following the G20 meeting.

“We have a shared worldview that it is important for us to be true to our values and ideals of rule of law, of a belief in human rights, a belief in our democratic practices, but that we also have to be respectful around the world and to listen and not simply dictate; that in this new world that we live in, that the way to get things done is to build partnerships and alliances as opposed to acting unilaterally,” Obama said. ♦

Fiscal 2010 Budget Seeks . . .

(Continued from page 18)

funding for nonproliferation activities to secure nuclear material at vulnerable sites.

Funding to maintain global leadership in providing food aid and life-sustaining support for refugees and other victims of conflict and disaster.

The submission of the president’s budget is the starting point for setting federal spending priorities for the fiscal year that begins October 1. Because the Constitution reserves to Congress the authority to raise and spend money for the federal government, the president’s budget is simply a recommendation. The actual spending amounts, or appropriations, will be hammered out over several months in a series of actions in Congress and negotiations between Congress and the White House. ♦

Government Actions Seen Affecting Economic Recovery

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — The effectiveness of actions taken by the Federal Reserve, the U.S. Treasury and other federal agencies in restoring financial stability will determine much of the timing and strength of the economic recovery, Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke says.

"We are better off moving aggressively today to solve our economic problems," Bernanke said March 3 in congressional testimony. "The alternative could be a prolonged episode of economic stagnation that would not only contribute to further deterioration in the fiscal situation, but would also imply lower output, employment and incomes for an extended period."

As a consequence of recent actions aimed at stabilizing the financial sector and restoring growth, the Obama administration submitted a fiscal year 2009 federal budget that projects a federal deficit of about \$1.8 trillion this year and approximately \$1 trillion in 2010 and again in 2011. That increases the debt-to-gross domestic product ratio from about 40 percent to more than 60 percent, Bernanke said in prepared testimony. The ratio has not reached that level since the 1950s.

"Our economy and financial markets face extraordinary challenges, and a failure by policymakers to address these challenges in a timely

way would likely be more costly in the end," Bernanke told the Senate Budget Committee. "All else equal, this is a development that all of us would have preferred to avoid."

The U.S. economy contracted 6.2 percent in the final quarter of 2008, and Federal Reserve economists expect more decline in the first six months of this year, Bernanke said.



Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke testifies on Capitol Hill in Washington, March 3, 2009, before the Senate Budget Committee. (AP Photo/Susan Walsh)

"The near-term indicators show little sign of improvement."

U.S. businesses laid off about 600,000 workers in January, which was about the same pace of job loss as in November 2008 and December 2008, he said. That has contributed to sizeable losses of equity and housing wealth, tighter credit, and households spending less, he said. New monthly unemployment figures are due out March 6. "The goal of the fiscal package is not just to provide a one-time boost to the economy, but to lay the groundwork for a self-sustaining,

broad-based recovery," Bernanke said. It is unlikely there will be a sustainable recovery if there is not a reasonable degree of financial stability, he said.

"Although progress has been made on the financial front since last fall, more needs to be done," he said.

President Obama met with British Prime Minister Gordon Brown at the White House March 3 to discuss the global crisis and review possible courses of action that will be discussed at the G20 conference of advanced and developing economies in London on April 2. Brown is chairing the conference; he says it is critical to improving global economic confidence. Brown speaks to the U.S. Congress March 4 and is urging the United States not to take a trade-

protectionist stance amid the slackening global economy.

Bernanke said U.S. manufacturing output in January reached its lowest level since the end of World War II.

"Given the weak economic environment, many businesses have apparently cut back their plans for capital expenditures significantly," he testified. "Moreover, exports, which had provided a welcome offset to the weakness in domestic demand through the middle of 2008, fell sharply in the final months of last

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Telling America's story

Government Actions Seen Affecting Economic . . .

(Continued from page 21)

year, and the incoming news suggests a widespread contraction in activity abroad."

Actions taken by the Federal Reserve, other federal agencies and foreign governments have helped improve conditions in some financial markets, Bernanke said. Specifically, strains in short-term funding of markets have eased since last fall as some interest rates have declined.

One bright spot, he said, is that many businesses have managed to trim inventories in recent quarters.

Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner told Congress separately March 3 that the current recession is made worse by a financial system that is unable to provide the credit necessary for recovery.

"You can see this across America as families find it difficult to get the financing they need to buy new

houses and cars while businesses have trouble lining up the credit necessary to meet payroll," he said.

Geithner said the U.S. government has taken on several responses simultaneously, beginning with a comprehensive economic recovery and financial stability plan, which is a package of targeted investments and tax cuts designed to get Americans back to work and get the economy growing.

To further spur lending to consumers for automobiles, education, credit cards and other types of loans, and to help small businesses at a time of extremely tight credit lending, the Federal Reserve announced March 3 a \$200 billion program called the Term Asset-Backed Security Loan Facility.

In addition, the Obama administration initiated a program to help homeowners buy or refinance homes by encouraging low mortgage interest rates, Geithner said. ♦

Obama Says Combat Forces to Be Withdrawn from Iraq in 2010 . . .

(Continued from page 9)

placed Iraqis," the president said. "America has a strategic interest — and a moral responsibility — to act."

The United States will take steps to increase international support for countries already hosting Iraqi refugees; cooperate with others to resettle Iraqis facing great personal risk; and work with the Iraqi government to resettle refugees and displaced Iraqis within Iraq.

Obama also directed comments to the Iraqi people, saying, "The United States pursues no claim on your territory or your resources. We respect your sovereignty and the tremendous sacrifices you have made for your country."

**COMPREHENSIVE REGIONAL
ENGAGEMENT**

Obama said the third part of the U.S. strategy is comprehensive American engagement across the region. "The United States will pursue principled and sustained engagement with all of the nations in the region, and that will include Iran and Syria," he said.

"This reflects a fundamental truth: We can no longer deal with regional challenges in isolation — we need a smarter, more sustainable and comprehensive approach."

Obama said that is why the United States is reemphasizing its diplomacy while relieving a burden on its armed forces, and it is also why the United States is refocusing on the terrorist group al-Qaida in Afghanistan and Pakistan. And it is

why in less than two months, three special envoys have been named for the Middle East and South Asia to support the work being led by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Obama named former U.S. Senator George Mitchell as special envoy for the Middle East, Ambassador Richard Holbrooke as special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, and now Ambassador Dennis Ross as special adviser on the Gulf and Southwest Asia.

In Afghanistan, Obama has already ordered an additional 17,000 troops to be deployed in the coming months and is expected to bring that number up to 30,000 troops in addition to the 38,000 already there. ♦